

“All our local union officials are ignoring us and hiding from us”

## UAW, media silent on allegations of fraud in Ford contract vote

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26 November 2015

It is nearly one week since the United Auto Workers reported the narrow ratification of its national contract agreement with Ford. During that time there has still been no response by the UAW to widespread allegations from Ford workers of fraud and improper conduct in relation to the voting.

There are reports that UAW officials at the Ford Rouge Complex (UAW Local 600) drove around the Dearborn Truck Plant pressuring workers to vote “yes,” and that unnumbered ballots, marked in pencil, were dumped in buckets. A photo circulating on the internet reportedly shows a trash barrel that UAW officials were taking to workers on the production line. There are also claims that the UAW preloaded the trash cans with fake “yes” ballots.

In the midst of the Ford contract vote, the UAW decided to reschedule the ballot at the Rouge Complex to be last nationally. The decision meant that UAW officials knew exactly how many votes they needed at the complex to secure ratification.

UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles scheduled a highly unusual press conference at the UAW Local 600 union hall in the midst of the voting, when it became clear the contract might fail. The contract had been heavily defeated at the Kansas City Assembly Plant as well as at two Ford factories in Louisville and the Chicago Assembly Plant.

At the press conference, from which WSWs reporters were barred and forcibly ejected (see video), Settles threatened that Ford would shift production out of the US if workers rejected the contract, and that workers might be subjected to a long and fruitless strike. Meanwhile, the UAW read the riot act to local officials, warning that their cushy positions were at stake in the

contract vote.

The UAW then announced a massive “yes” vote by members of Local 600 on the Ford agreement, resulting in a razor-thin 51 percent approval margin for the contract nationally.

Under normal democratic procedures, such a narrow margin would warrant at least a recount of ballots. However, the UAW has stonewalled all questions regarding the vote. In the wake of the vote UAW President Dennis Williams has refused requests for interviews. Calls by the WSWs to the UAW have not been returned.

The corporate media is also doing its part to facilitate the UAW’s efforts to ram through the contract. None of the major media outlets have raised any questions over the legitimacy of the vote or reported workers’ concerns.

Also silent on the Ford vote are various pseudo-left outfits that defend the UAW, including the International Socialist Organization and *Labor Notes*. Gary Wolkowicz, a member of the bargaining committee at the Dearborn Truck Plant and a supporter of *Labor Notes*, has not issued any statement since the report of the Ford vote last Friday.

Speaking of the silence from the UAW, a Ford worker from the Louisville Assembly Plant told the WSWs, “I am not surprised. That’s what I would do if I had something to hide, I would just avoid it. All our local union officials are just ignoring us and hiding from us.

“There were a lot of people from Michigan who transferred down here. They say there is no way that it passed. There were things going on in other plants as well. They had union people telling you how to vote.

“They had a press conference in the middle of the contract vote. They are not supposed to try to sway our vote once voting has started. I am pretty fed up with it.”

“There was someone painting a sign in our plant saying, ‘Jimmy Settles for Less.’”

A tier-one worker at the GM Lake Orion Assembly Plant said, “This contract is a big joke. Why vote if we don’t have a say so? The issue for skilled trades at GM was the outsourcing of work. It was legitimate. But the UAW still overturned it.”

Even before the Ford votes were counted, the UAW ratified the GM contract, brazenly overriding the “no” vote of skilled trades workers who rejected it by a nearly 60 percent margin.

In relation to the vote at Ford the GM worker said, “They are not going to respond to anything like that [the charges of fraud]. They think they are above it. They are a corporation now. It is a buddy system. They pull their buddies in to do the dirty work. If they want something passed, they are going to pass it, period.”

A worker at the Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant with 21 years said, “They are not going to respond unless there is a court order. They are going to get their way.

“The vote was mighty strange. It has been the same the last two or three contracts. The UAW leaders urge a ‘yes’ vote and draft a letter and have everybody sign it.

“I thought the fix was in on Veteran’s Day. Under the old contract the holiday was observed on a Friday. This year they observed the holiday on a Monday, according to the terms of the new contract, but the new contract had not even been ratified!

“Then there here was an arrogant statement by Settles, saying the membership was the highest authority. The contract vote was not a victory for the UAW, in fact you had a near mutiny.

“There is a general sentiment that the UAW is just another level of hierarchy. No one keeps track of them. They sit in their air-conditioned offices while we are suffering the heat.

“Last summer in the plant the heat index went up to 111 degrees (F). There are places in the plant that are even hotter. Last summer I felt we could die out there. They want you to work 10.7 hours a day in that heat.

“I really liked the last WSWS article, ‘The UAW’s illegitimate vote at Ford.’ They are really just labor contractors. They are a scab union. They work for the

company.”

Another veteran worker at the Kansas City Assembly Plant told the WSWS, “I strongly believe it was unfair. With all the allegations against Jimmy Settles, strongarming and ballot stuffing, I think charges should be filed.

“We knew the contract would not pass at our plants. We had workers taking pictures of their ballots marked ‘no,’ then the UAW told us to stop taking pictures, that no cameras were allowed.

“Why is no one jumping on this? Is the media scared? I think eventually the facts will have to come out.”



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